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MEDIA CONTACTS
Jared Touchin | 928.221.9253
Jolene Holgate | 928.380.4174
nnlb.communications@gmail.com

Health, Education, and Human Services Committee receives report on overall progress of Navajo Nation Head Start

WINDOW ROCK – On Wednesday, the Health Education and Human Services Committee received a report on the progress of the Navajo Nation Head Start program.

“We have spent the last nine months working diligently to restructure this multi-million dollar program and improve the quality of it for our Nation’s youngest children,” said Navajo Nation Head Start assistant superintendent Sharon Singer.

According to the report, Navajo Head Start has been working to correct deficiencies that have been identified, such as lack of certified staff, restructuring of the program, curriculum improvement, building maintenance, transportation, and other related issues that once plagued the program.

HEHSC member Council Delegate Joshua Lavar Butler (Tó Nanees Dizi) expressed his support for the efforts the Head Start program is currently undertaking and stressed the importance of their services to the Navajo Nation.

“I believe that Head Start is finally back on track and the leadership has demonstrated their capabilities of the program,” said Delegate Butler. “The people you serve are the children and you have given them a voice.”

Singer stated that in conjunction with the overhaul of the Head Start program, it has allowed for the expansion of 20 additional service centers by the end of next week. McKinley County Schools also gave the program 90 modular buildings for additional classrooms and teacher housing.

The written report also includes the current data for the program, which includes: 69 service centers currently open, 1,703 enrolled students, 439 total staff members, 70 percent of the teachers are certified as “high-quality” in their teaching abilities, according to Head Start Performance Standards, and the remaining 30 percent of the teachers hold a bachelor’s degree.

HEHSC member Council Delegate Walter Phelps (Cameron, Coalmine Canyon, Leupp, Tolani Lake, Tsidi To’ii) said he was elated at the continued improvements of the program, and asked Singer what protocols the program follows when there has been a declaration of emergency.

“Our program is unique because the location of our schools is very rural and a large majority of our transportation is on dirt roads. We have an internal alert system that our staff uses that provides recommendations so we can get approval to close centers, if need be,” said Singer.

At the conclusion of the meeting, Delegate Butler said the Navajo Head Start program has strong support from tribal leaders and are eager to see the fruition of the program’s enhancements that will benefit Navajo children.

HEHSC voted 3-0 to accept the report.

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